

SENATOR JOAN HUFFMAN

CAPITOL UPDATE

THE 81ST LEGISLATURE

COMMITTEES:
GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION
HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
TRANSPORTATION & HOMELAND SECURITY
VETERANS AFFAIRS & MILITARY INSTALLATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BASE REALIGNMENT & CLOSURES



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Dear Friends,

First and foremost, thank you for the privilege of serving as your State Senator. As you may know, the 81st Legislative Session has adjourned and as we head into the interim, I would like to update you on many of the highlights and accomplishments of the session.

In the aftermath of the catastrophic damage caused by Hurricane Ike, my top priority this session was to fully restore the coast by directing state resources to help rebuild homes and infrastructure and reopen businesses. Our district encompasses one-third of the state's coast, and includes many major businesses, schools, hospitals, and neighborhoods that are vital to Texas. It was my priority to make sure that the Legislature did everything possible to reinvigorate the coastal area we call home.

I also had the opportunity this session to serve on several important committees that deal with some of the most pressing issues facing Texas families, including the Transportation & Homeland Security Committee, the Health & Human Services Committee, the Veteran's Affairs Committee, and the Government Organization Committee. During the interim, committees will begin holding meetings to receive input from you as we review the implementation of recently passed laws and begin developing new legislation in advance of the 2011 legislative session.

I appreciate all of you who called or wrote my office during the legislative session. Your input kept me informed and was critical in allowing me to represent your values in the legislature.

Finally, I am proud to announce that I have opened two district offices to better serve you during the interim. I hope you will contact my office with any questions, comments, or suggestions you may have. My staff and I look forward to assisting you in any way possible.

It is my hope that you will find the information in this newsletter helpful. Again, thank you for the opportunity to serve you. Please feel free to contact me should you need my assistance.

Sincerely,

Joan Huffman
Senator Joan Huffman



Sen. Huffman took office in December 2008 after winning a special election to fill the vacated office of Senate District 17. She was joined by her family as the oath of office was administered by Attorney General Greg Abbott during a ceremony at the Texas Capitol.

Inside . . .

- LEGISLATIVE UPDATE
- DISTRICT HAPPENINGS
- IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

Balancing the Budget

The 81st Legislative Session had many unique dynamics. As a fiscal conservative, I was proud to vote for a balanced budget that trimmed state spending during this current economic downturn. Even with budget constraints, we successfully increased funding to improve public education, reformed hurricane insurance, and allocated funds to rebuild the coast and prepare for future natural disasters. Furthermore, the Legislature passed a balanced budget without increasing taxes or dipping into the Rainy Day Fund. The fiscal responsibility displayed by the Legislature will help ensure Texas remains economically strong for years to come.

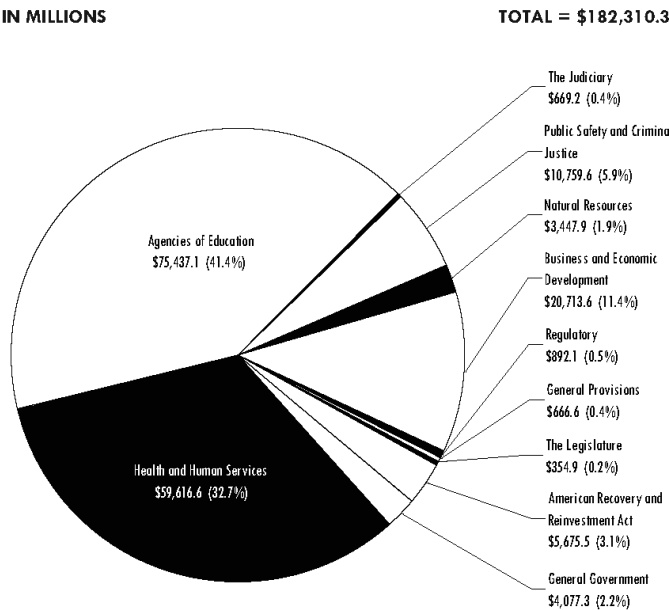
The Legislature approved an operating budget of \$182.3 billion for the State of Texas through 2011. This is a nearly \$1.6 billion reduction in general revenue spending from the past budget cycle, but also succeeds in increasing funding for health and human services, border security, and public and higher education.



Senator Huffman working with Senate Finance Committee members Senator Royce West and Chairman Steve Ogden.

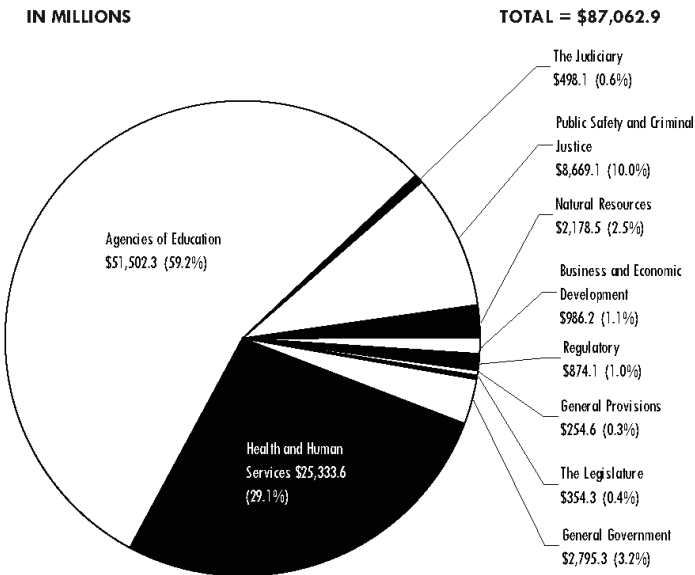
2010–11 BIENNIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

FIGURE 1
ALL FUNDS



NOTE: Excludes Interagency Contracts.

FIGURE 2
GENERAL REVENUE FUNDS AND
GENERAL REVENUE–DEDICATED FUNDS



NOTES: Chart does not account for the \$6,383.3 million reduction in General Revenue Funds in Article XII. Percentage values do not sum to 100 percent.

BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

- ★ \$4.5 billion increase in Medicaid funding, providing additional assistance to children, pregnant mothers, the elderly, and the disabled.+
- ★ \$122 million increase in CHIP (Children’s Health Insurance Program) funding.+
- ★ \$1.9 billion increase in new funding to public schools, providing for educator salary increases and new instructional facilities.
- ★ \$117.5 million increase in general revenue funding for patient care at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, and the University of Texas Health Science Center at Tyler.
- ★ \$1.1 billion in new funding for UTMB clean-up, repair, and future disaster preparedness.
- ★ \$76.6 million for border security operations, including 66 additional personnel for the Department of Public Safety.+
- ★ \$17.1 billion for transportation planning and design, maintenance, and new construction to alleviate traffic congestion.+

+ Increase in All Funds.

Hurricane Response

Hurricane Ike may have blown through the state last September, but the effects of the storm lingered throughout the session. District 17 received a direct hit from Ike. Restoring our vital coast and protecting our citizens in the event of another Ike-sized storm was my top legislative priority.

\$1 BILLION FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS MEDICAL BRANCH

Our coastal delegation and community leaders worked tirelessly to secure over \$1 billion in state and federal funding needed by UTMB to repair educational, research, hospital, and clinical space. This new funding allowed the Trauma Center to reopen this summer at Level Three status and will enable the center to return to Level One by early 2010. I was pleased by the extraordinary efforts of so many dedicated local and state leaders to ensure UTMB remains a vital asset for Galveston Island and the surrounding region.

Additionally, we authorized \$150 million in tuition revenue bonds to build a new 200-bed hospital tower adjacent to the existing John Sealy Hospital, restoring bed capacity to 550, as it was prior to Hurricane Ike. These funds will be matched by a \$200 million contribution from the Sealy Smith Foundation.

WINDSTORM INSURANCE REFORM

The Texas Windstorm Insurance Association (TWIA) is the insurer of last resort for wind and hail coverage in our coastal counties. This means that when private insurers refuse to cover wind and hail damages in homeowner's policies, homeowners have a safety net. Due to increased development and activity along the coast over the last several years, TWIA now has over \$60 billion of exposure.

The Legislature reformed TWIA, so it can respond more quickly and efficiently after a storm and cover up to \$2.5 billion in losses through various funding methods. Damage payments can now be funded by premiums, reserves, public securities, and other market source financial instruments. These reforms also require an incentive program for insurers to voluntarily write coverage for coastal homeowners. This provision will assist consumers in searching for



Senator Huffman and Representative Craig Eiland worked closely with local leaders throughout the session on Hurricane Ike recovery legislation and UTMB funding.

other providers with the goal of shifting the coverage burden away from TWIA, ultimately reestablishing it as the insurer of last resort.

HURRICANE HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION

The Legislature passed House Bill 770 which protects coastal residents by ensuring that residents, whose homes have been damaged by a hurricane, will continue to receive their homestead exemption while their home is being repaired. This homeowner protection requires repairs to begin within one year, and the exemption is limited to two years.

“SAVE OUR BEACHES” LICENSE PLATE

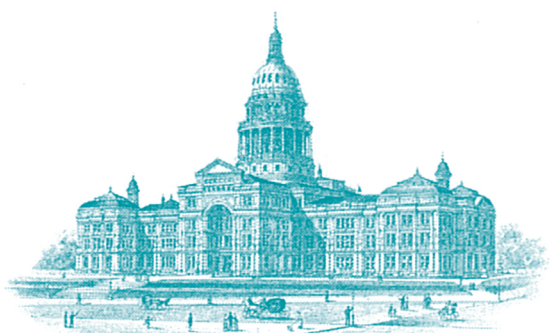
Beginning September 1st, Texas drivers will have the option of choosing the “Save Our Beaches” license plate. Revenue from these plates will go into the Coastal Protection and Improvement Fund and help finance coastal projects in Gulf Coast counties.

Protecting Small Business



Senator Dan Patrick and Senator Huffman discuss much needed protections for small businesses in Texas.

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, providing most of the jobs for Texans. I was proud to co-sponsor House Bill 4765, which will alleviate the tax burden on small businesses earning less than \$1 million in annual revenue by exempting them from the state's franchise tax. An estimated 40,000 small businesses are expected to benefit, creating more jobs for Texans.



Keeping Texans Healthy

As a member of the Health and Human Services Committee, I took part in debates on a number of family health issues. I consistently supported healthcare solutions based on increasing access to quality, affordable healthcare, while reducing the cost to the taxpayers.

Our committee worked to help alleviate health provider shortages across the state, particularly critical physician and nursing shortages in medically underserved areas. I authored Senate Bill 1225, which authorizes faculty with temporary medical licenses to teach at certain teaching hospitals and non-profit health organizations. This will allow us to train more nurses and doctors for Texans. I also authored, co-authored, and sponsored many other health-related bills, most notably:

★ **S.B. 911** - cracks down on the controversial “pill mills” that have plagued counties in southeast Texas.

★ **S.B. 1082** - requires the preservation of patients’ mammography records, ensuring that Texas women are able to maintain a detailed medical history of their breast cancer tests and screenings.

★ **H.B. 461** - creates a comprehensive study of various methods of treating persons with dyslexia and recognizes certain individuals with extensive education and experience in treating dyslexia.

★ **H.B. 675** - authored by Representative Dennis Bonnen, allows retired optometrists to provide optometric services for charity.

Educating Texas Children



Senator Huffman enjoyed sponsoring several young constituents to serve as honorary Senate messengers during the 81st Legislature.

The Legislature also made critical education reforms this session. As a mother, I understand that we must do everything possible to improve our children’s education. These education reforms will greatly benefit our children by improving their quality of education, better preparing them to pursue their dreams.

★ **H.B. 3646** - the Public School Finance bill – returns our school finance system to a formula-driven system and ensures that mid-size school districts receive positive funding adjustments needed to educate children.

★ **H.B. 3** - the Public School Accountability bill – holds school districts accountable for the success of their students, allows for better evaluation of student performance, and increases emphasis on postsecondary and college readiness rather than standardized testing (TAKS test). This bill also provides for a much needed, across the board pay-raise for our public school educators.

Victim Protection, Judicial Reform

PUNISHING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSERS

In child sexual abuse trials, child witness testimony is often challenged as unreliable due to poor recollection, fear, or distraction. “Outcry witnesses” are adults who hear and report a child’s statements about abuse. The law did not allow outcry witnesses to tell a jury about other crimes or sexual abuse committed against other children during the sentencing phase of trial. I sponsored House Bill 2846 to allow juries to consider this testimony when sentencing a convicted child sexual abuser in order to secure stronger penalties for child predators. This law becomes effective September 1, 2009.

JURY AUTHORITY

I authored a bill that would have limited a judge’s ability to overturn a jury sentence. Standing trial before a jury of peers is fundamental to the criminal justice system. A single judge should not be able to override a unanimous jury recommendation. While the bill passed the Senate with overwhelming support, it unfortunately got bogged down in the House. I’m disappointed we were not able to pass this common sense reform, but I look forward to finishing the task next session.



Senator Huffman was deeply honored to receive the “Legislator of the Year for Children” Award from Children At Risk for her work during the legislative session.

Securing the Border



Senator Huffman joined other members of the Legislature in a border security briefing and tour to discuss strategies for protecting the border.

Texas continues to provide the critical line of defense toward securing the Texas-Mexico border. The Legislature approved \$76.6 million in funding for the state's border security and gang strategy, including prosecution resources for local district attorneys and operational costs for local law enforcement and state troopers.

As a member of the Senate Transportation and Homeland Security Committee, I was a strong supporter of Senate Bill 358, which would have ended sanctuary city policies in Texas. Ignoring immigration laws restricts crucial

communication between local and federal officials regarding law-breaking individuals and endangers the public by allowing criminals to roam the streets.

I authored Senate Bill 1422, which would have ended the state's revolving door policy of releasing illegal aliens under community supervision. I am committed to strengthening our immigration laws and penalties and will continue to fight next session for reforms that protect families from violent criminals.

Strengthening Private Property Rights

As a strong proponent of private property rights, I believe it is vital to define the privileges and protections granted to Texas property owners within our state constitution. Texans will have the opportunity to vote on 11 constitutional amendments this fall, two of which clarify private property owners' rights.

★ **Prop. 2** - proposes a constitutional amendment to Article VIII of the Texas Constitution to establish that the ad valorem taxation of a residence homestead is based solely on the property's value as a homestead, regardless of whether a homestead designation is considered the property's highest and best use by the government. This will protect Texas homeowners from excessive property tax increases by ensuring that home appraisals are based on the property's actual use. This is especially important in areas transitioning from residential to commercial use.



Senator Huffman responds to testimony during a committee hearing.

★ **Prop. 11** - proposes an amendment to Article I of the Texas Constitution to more clearly define the circumstances under which a person's private property may be taken for a public use, as well as the level of compensation required in such cases.

These amendments will be voted on in the November 3, 2009 election. For additional information on all the propositions on the ballot visit the Secretary of State's website at: www.sos.state.tx.us.

Visit TexasOnline.com for these online services and additional information:

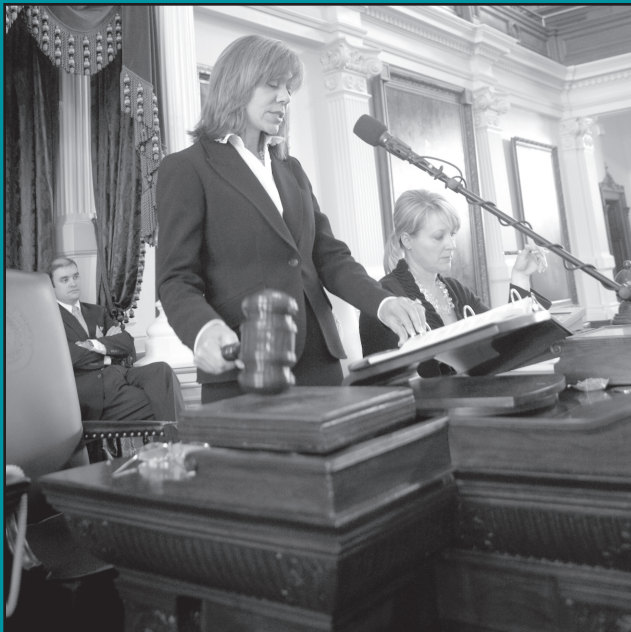
- Renew your driver license
- Renew your vehicle registration
- Obtain professional licenses
- Order specialty license plates
- Purchase birth, death, marriage or divorce records
- Learn how to start a business in Texas
- Get information about emergency preparedness
- And much, much more!



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About Senator Joan Huffman

Sen. Huffman took office in December 2008 after winning a special election to fill the vacated office of Senate District 17. Prior to serving in the Senate, Huffman was twice elected Judge to the 183rd Criminal District Court. She earned a reputation as a fair and tough enforcer of the law. The Houston Police Officer's Union recognized Huffman as the "Criminal District Judge of the Year" in 2000. Senator Huffman earned her undergraduate degree from Louisiana State University. After graduation, she moved to Houston embarking upon a distinguished career with the Harris County District Attorney's Office. As a secretary, Huffman was inspired by the dedication of Harris County prosecutors and decided to attend law school. She took night classes at South Texas School of Law while serving as a legal intern and secretary. Upon earning her law degree, Huffman was hired as a prosecutor and advanced from misdemeanor court to Chief Felony Prosecutor, Special Crimes Gang Prosecutor, and Legal Counsel to the Organized Crime Narcotics Task Force. She served as lead prosecutor in over 100 jury trials, including murders, sexual assaults, aggravated robberies, and sexual assaults of children.

